

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Veterans honored at Military Appreciation Day in Sturgis

By Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen
SDNG Public Affairs Office

STURGIS, S.D. - Senior leaders from the South Dakota National Guard and Ellsworth Air Force Base were among the hundreds gathered at the Sturgis Community Center for the annual Military Appreciation Day, Aug. 5, 2014, during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally.

The City of Sturgis, along with the SDNG and Ellsworth AFB, spearhead the annual event that pays tribute to a decorated war veteran.

Following a proclamation from Sturgis Mayor Mark Carstensen declaring the day DeWayne Hayes Day, Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general, and Command Chief Master Sgt. Jim Welch, senior enlisted leader, presented Hayes, a U.S. Air Force Korean War veteran, a coin of excellence for his service to the nation.

Next, Col. Ty Neuman, vice commander of the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth AFB, and Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Peterson presented Hayes, of Sturgis, with an American flag flown over Afghanistan in a B-1 Bomber on July 4, 2014.

Staff Sgt. Hayes, 84, served at Kimbo Air Force Base in Korea from 1950-1954 where he was assigned to the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Group Intelligence as a target controller.

Following Hayes' recognition, one of South Dakota's fallen heroes was honored and thanks to a non-profit organization, long lost awards were presented to family members.

Second Lt. Harry William Bessler, a Black Hills resident, was a B-24 Liberator bomber pilot sent to Italy on Dec. 15, 1943. Just one month later, his plane was damaged during a bombing mission south of Rome and crashed.

After missing in action for more than one year, on May 18, 1945, Bessler was pronounced dead. Years later his remains would be recovered from the plane's cockpit.

His wife was presented his Purple Heart, but the award, along with of his other medals, were lost in a house fire following her death.

Capt. Zachariah Fike, of the Vermont Army National Guard and founder of Purple Hearts Reunited, a non-profit organization that locates lost or stolen military medals and returns them to veterans or their families, then presented Bessler's reclaimed medals to his nephew, Tom Maples, of Rapid City, along

with a framed flag and a portrait of Bessler.

“I was only three years old when my uncle died,” Maples said to the crowd of supporters. “I never really got to know him, but through stories and such, he was always my hero. Now I can share this with everybody and prove he definitely was a hero.”

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High resolution photos are available at www.flickr.com/southdakotationalguard



140805-Z-CW157-021: U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the South Dakota National Guard (left), and Command Chief Master Sgt. Jim Welch, senior enlisted leader, present DeWayne Hayes, of Sturgis, S.D., with a coin of excellence for his service during the Korean War, at the annual Military Appreciation Day, Aug. 5, 2014, during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Staff Sgt. Hayes served at Kimbo Air Force Base in Korea from 1950-1954 where he was assigned to the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Group Intelligence as a target controller. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen/Released)



140805-F-UP124-237: U.S. Air Force Col. Ty Neuman, vice commander of the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth Air Force Base present DeWayne Hayes, of Sturgis, S.D., with a U.S. flag for his service during the Korean War, at the annual Military Appreciation Day, Aug. 5, 2014, during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Staff Sgt. Hayes served at Kimbo Air Force Base in Korea from 1950-1954 where he was assigned to the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Group Intelligence as a target controller. (U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Anania Tekurio/Released)



140805-Z-CW157-033: U.S. Army Capt. Zachariah Fike, founder of Purple Hearts Reunited and a member of Vermont's Army National Guard, presents Tom Maples, of Rapid City, S.D., with a framed flag, portrait and reclaimed medals of his late uncle, 2nd Lt. Harry William Bessler, a B-24 Liberator pilot, at the annual Military Appreciation Day, Aug. 5, 2014, during the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. Purple Hearts Reunited locates lost or stolen military medals and returns them to veterans or their families. Bessler's medals, to include a Purple Heart, were lost in a house fire. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Theanne Tangen/Released)

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